

ART. XXVI.—*The Transcripts of the Registers in Brampton Deanery.* By the REV. H. WHITEHEAD, M.A.

Read at Penrith, January 20th, 1881.

AMONG the injunctions contained in the “Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical,” issued in 1603, is the following:—

And the Churchwardens shall once every year, within one month after the five and twentieth day of March, transmit unto the Bishop of the Diocese, or his Chancellor, a true copy of the names of all persons christened, married, or buried in their parish the year before ended the said five and twentieth day of March, and the certain days and months in which every such christening, marriage, and burial was held, to be subscribed with the hands of the minister and churchwardens, to the end the same may faithfully be preserved in the registry of the said bishop. (*Canon LXX.*)

Of the use and value of these “transcripts,” as they are called, the records of trials in the law courts furnish some striking illustrations. Thus—

In the Chandos case a marriage was proved by the transcript, from the Archbishop of Canterbury’s registry, of the register of Owre in Kent, the original register having been lost. In the claim of Charlotte Gertrude M’Carthy, in 1825, to the Stafford peerage, the duplicates of the registers were called for, and forgery in the original thus discovered. In the case of St. Bride’s register a woman cut out two leaves, hoping to destroy all proof of her marriage. Fortunately there happened to be a transcript in the Bishop of London’s registry, and so the marriage was proved. In the Angell case, where an agricultural labourer established his claim to property valued at a million of money, the Attorney-General obtained a rule nisi for a new trial, on the ground that the registers produced in court had been tampered with, as was proved by comparing them with the bishop’s transcripts. The original entry was the burial of Margaret Ange, which had been altered to Marriott Angell. In the Leigh peerage case the agent opposing the claim had searched the original register at Wigan for a certain baptism, but without success, there being a general chasm at the period (1658.) When the House of Lords had nearly concluded
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the hearing the agent wrote to the registrar of the bishop at Chester. The letter arrived a little after eight in the evening of the 4th of June, 1829. The search was made, the baptism found, and communicated the same night. On the following Thursday the document was produced, and decided the case against the claimant. (*Burn's History of Parish Registers*, 2nd edition, pp. 205-6.)

The transcripts of the Brampton deanery registers may never be required to sustain or defeat a claim to "property valued at a million of money." Still they may and do serve some useful purposes.

There is, for instance, in Irthington parish register a gap of seven years, viz., from 1722 to 1729. An old inhabitant of Irthington tells me that the wife of a former parish clerk, who kept a grocer's shop, was in the habit of tearing out pages from the register and using them as wrappers for tea, cheese, and tobacco. This may account for there being no register extant at Irthington of earlier date than 1704, and it may also account for the above-mentioned gap. The gap, however, may yet be filled with copies of the original entries if any one will take the trouble of transcribing them from the duplicates in the diocesan registry at Carlisle.

In the Brampton register there is a similar gap of five years, from 1707 to 1712. This gap has not been caused in the same way as that at Irthington, since it is evident that the records for those five years were never in the register. Nevertheless they are in the transcripts, from which I have copied them, and written them in the register. I was at first somewhat surprised at finding "a true copy" of what had never existed. But the inference is that the transcripts in this case were copied from rough minutes kept by the vicar or the clerk, from which same minutes the register should have been, but was not, posted up. Probably in many cases, in those days, the originals were such minutes, from which both the register and transcripts were copied at the end of the year.

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This inference is strengthened by the circumstance of the entries in the transcripts sometimes being fuller than those in the register. The transcripts, if copied from the register, might be expected to be condensed; and such in later years is generally found to have been the case. But before the middle of last century it was often otherwise. Thus, in my paper on "Robert Bowman," in this volume of our Transactions, (p. 37), I have quoted the following entry from the Brampton register:—

The son of Robert Bowman bapt. 1705.

The corresponding entry in the transcript is this:—

John, the son of Robert Bowman, baptized *July 2, 1705.*

Again, in the Brampton register for 1714, in which year twenty-two baptisms were recorded, in no case is the occupation of the father mentioned, whilst in the transcript for the same year as many as eleven of the fathers are described as yeomen, a valuable piece of information, not merely as indicating the priority of the transcript in point of time, but as revealing the former prevalence of yeomen in a parish where now very few yeomen are to be found.

In the paper on "Robert Bowman" it has also been shewn that an omission in the Hayton transcript for 1705, at first sight unaccountable, led to the discovery of the real character of an entry in the Hayton register, which had long passed for the baptismal register of the reputed centenarian, but which on further examination was found to be merely a memorandum of the birth of a child whose christian name and sex were not mentioned.

Amongst other uses of the transcripts is the information they supply as to the vicars and churchwardens, whose names are often omitted from the registers, but, as required by the 70th Canon, are signed (autographically) at the end of the transcript for each year. By this means may be recovered the names of some vicars not recorded in the defective lists of incumbents given in the histories of Cumberland

berland. Moreover, the autograph signatures of vicars or churchwardens are often very useful to any one who cares to examine the multitudinous documents contained in a parish chest.

But, perhaps, the greatest value of the transcripts consists in their affording the means of recovering the contents of lost registers of earlier date than any now extant in many of our parishes. It was for this purpose that I first consulted them. Knowing that the transcripts were ordered by the canons of 1603, and also by a previous injunction in 1597, I had hoped to find the "true copy" of an earlier Brampton register than the oldest now existing, which begins in 1663. This, however, I did not find. Nor is there, so far as my observation has extended, any transcript in the Carlisle registry of earlier date than 1663. Whether the earlier transcripts were not sent in, or have been lost, cannot perhaps be ascertained. Those now extant all begin at 1663, or a few years later. But that is early enough for them to supply to many parishes what they fail to supply to Brampton; for few parish registers in this neighbourhood reach back as far as the Restoration. The date at which the existing register in each parish in Brampton deanery begins will be seen in the following table, to which is also appended the date at which the transcripts of each register begin: —

	Register.	Transcripts.
Hayton	1622	1665
Brampton	1663	1665
Farlam	1665	1665
Cumrew	1679	1664
Lanercost	1684	1666
Walton	1684	1666
Castle Carrock	1689	1665
Nether Denton	1703	1666
Irthington	1704	1667
Stapleton	1725	1663
Cumwhitton	1731	1663
Bewcastle	1737	1665

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From which it appears that nearly every parish in the deanery has suffered the loss of registers, the contents of which may yet be recovered from the transcripts; and what is true of this deanery is doubtless true of other deaneries.

The condition of the registers, therefore, and the means of rendering them as complete as may yet be possible, might be a useful subject for consideration at ruridecanal meetings.

Nor would the value of such an inquiry be limited to the recovery of lost records of baptisms, marriages, and burials, or the repairing of other defects in the registers; for the transcripts incidentally supply curious and interesting information on matters outside the province of the register. Often the churchwardens sent in their "presentments" and answers to the visitation "articles of inquiry" on the same paper on which they wrote the transcripts. A few extracts from these documents will be found in the following account of "Old Church Plate in Brampton Deanery;" but as in various ways they throw light on the condition of the churches and the manners of the parishioners in those days, I hope on some future occasion to make them the subject of a separate paper.

Meanwhile I take this opportunity of thanking our diocesan registrar, Mr. Mounsey, for the courtesy with which he has afforded me every facility for examining these interesting records.

